

Whistler Blackcomb

ON THE DOWN LOW *By Jeremy Pugh*



Peak to Peak Gondola

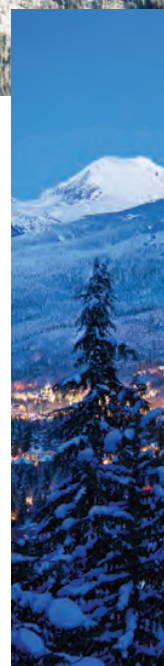
WITH ONE OF THE WORLD'S greatest ski resorts right here in the Tetons, Jacksonites can be forgiven for a lack of curiosity about skiing elsewhere. Why would we think about another resort? But let's not pretend that we don't have a wandering eye from time to time. Be honest, you've said the word, perhaps over beers at the Mangy Moose, leaning in and whispering it across the table: "Whistler." Just saying it feels like you're cheating on Jackson, right? Nevertheless, you find yourself dreaming of Canadian ridgelines, poutine, and ice-cold Molsons.

And this is okay. Go ahead and leave that Jackson Hole Mountain Resort season pass dangling on the key peg and slip away to Vancouver, British Columbia, for a ski vacation. After landing in Vancouver, it's only a two-hour drive on the Sea-to-Sky Highway (see sidebar) into the Fitzsimmons Range, where you'll quickly be sitting in front of a roaring fire in your pied-à-terre in one of Whistler's two base villages, a trail map spread out before you.

Whistler is really Whistler Blackcomb Ski Resort, and all the space between its two massive, namesake peaks. All told, it's the largest ski area in North America. From the lowest base area at the resort, Creekside Village, the ascent to the top is dramatic: A gondola and lift take you from 2,140 feet above sea level to Whistler Mountain's 7,156-foot summit. (Blackcomb Peak's summit is even higher, nearly 8,000 feet, but isn't served by a lift.)

From Whistler Mountain's summit, you'll have the entirety of the Fitzsimmons Range laid out at your feet. Most of what you're looking at is Garibaldi Provincial Park, a wilderness area unsullied by the development and luxury cabins that increasingly junk up alpine scenery in the United States. Where you go from here is up to you, but with 200 marked runs, 8,171 acres of terrain, sixteen alpine bowls, and three glaciers to explore, there's no shortage of options.

Don't worry, Jackson Hole never needs to know.



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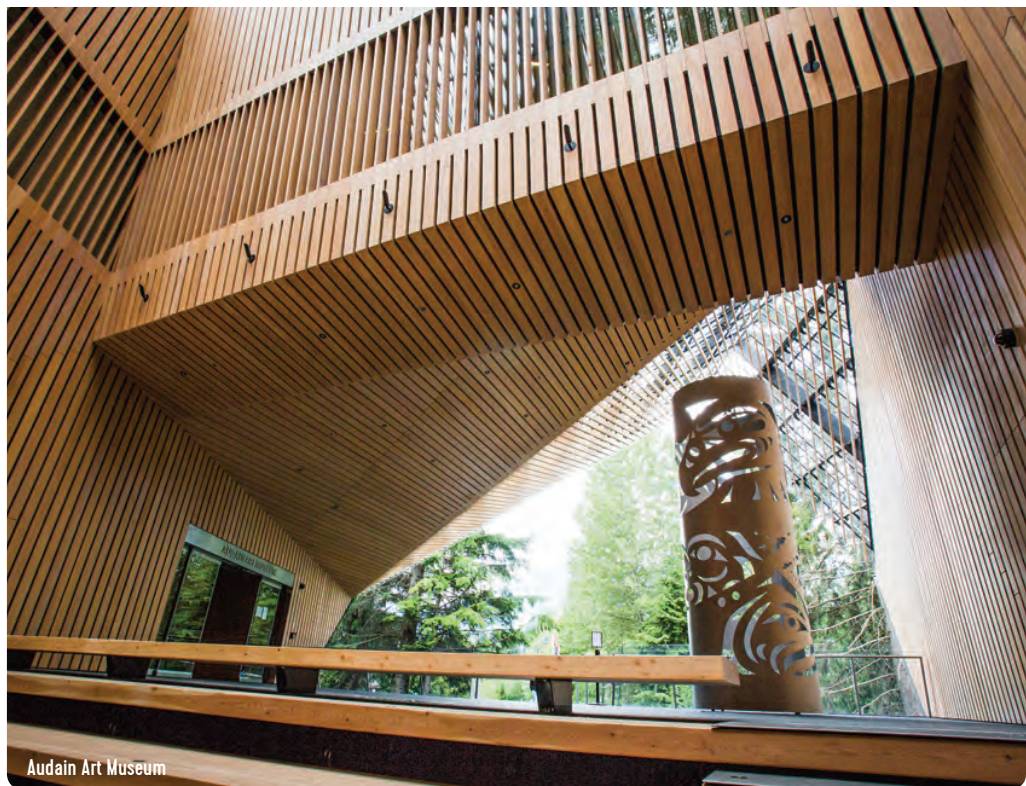
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Whistler Blackcomb

GET YOUR ART AND ARCHITECTURE ON

Apart from the quad-burning ski days that are the center of this visit, you'll want to make sure you don't miss the **Audain Art Museum** (4350 Blackcomb Way, 604/962-0413, audainartmuseum.com). Home of a fascinating collection of First Nation artworks, as well as contemporary works by Canadian artists, the 56,000-square-foot building designed by architect John Patkau is itself a work of art. The Audain is a must-see along Whistler's **Cultural Connector** (whistler.ca), a scenic path that links six of the ski village's major cultural institutions. On your stroll, also stop into the **Maury Young Arts Centre** (4335 Blackcomb Way, 604/935-8410, artswhistler.com), the home of Arts Whistler, a gallery and hub of local artistic and cultural activity. Check the center's calendar before you visit to find activities for all ages. **The Whistler Museum** (4333 Main St., 604/932-2019, whistlermuseum.org) gives a funky, fun rundown of the timeline from Whistler being a tiny fishing village to its Olympic glory days. Also along the Cultural Connector, you'll find two notable works of public art—Susan Point's bronze sculpture, *A Timeless Circle*, and James Stewart's *Jeri*, a compelling figure study of a Brazilian Capoeira fighter ready to spring into action.



Audain Art Museum



Keir Fine Jewellery

BRING IT HOME

Amid the usual resort suspects—gear and T-shirt shops—are some one-off gems, literally in the case of **Keir Fine Jewellery** (4321 Village Gate Blvd., 604/932-2944, keirfinejewellery.com). The boutique jewelry store specializes in inspired settings for Canadian diamonds and other stones. If you do find yourself with a hankering for gear, pop into the **Whistler Clearance Centre**, (4204 Village Square, 604/905-3347); it's not fancy, and requires digging through its racks, but here that's part of the fun. **Plaza Galleries** (22-4314 Main St., 604/938-6233, plazagalleries.com) is that ski town gallery but offers an eclectically curated selection of work by international artists that you won't find in Jackson.



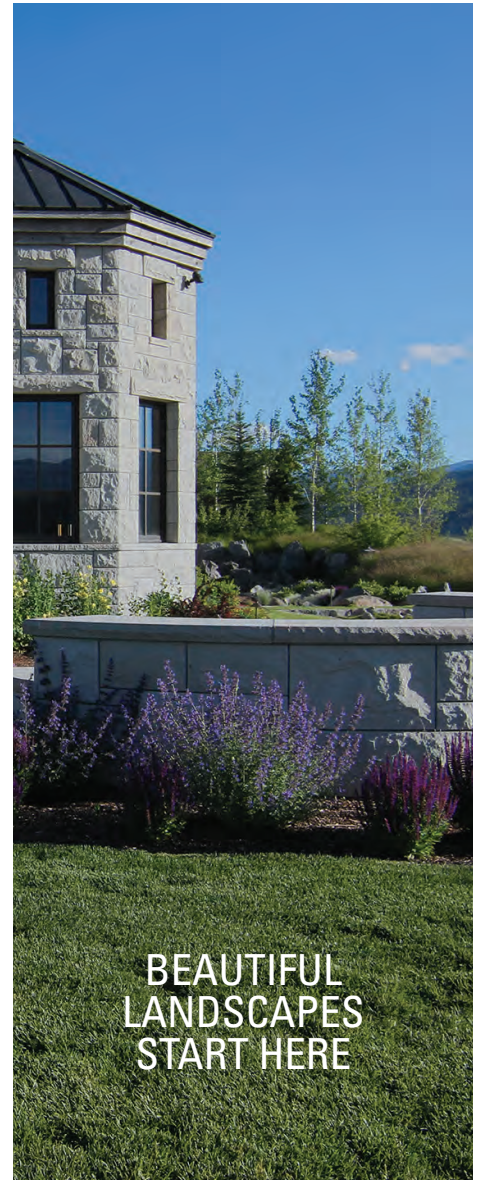
The Whistler Museum



Crystal Hut waffle

PLAY

Most of your time will surely be spent exploring the vast resort you came to Canada to ski, and there is a lot to explore. Break it down into smaller chunks by joining one of the **free mountain tours** given daily on each of the two peaks. The colorful volunteers who lead the tours are Whistler lifers who will ensure that you see the best each mountain offers (whistlerblackcomb.com). For a break from downhill skiing, book a self-guided snowshoeing or cross-country ski excursion with **Cross Country Connection** (604/905-0071, crosscountryconnection.ca). Or join a guided zip line, snowmobile, or snowshoe tour with **The Adventure Group** (855/824-9955, tagwhistler.com). Finally, ditch the gear and the cold completely and book (in advance) an afternoon or evening at **Scandinave Spa** (8010 Mons Rd., 604/935-2424, scandinave.com). This place is no joke—very hot and very cold pools sit in a beautiful garden that also has cozy chill-out rooms where you can catch your breath.



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Scandinave Spa

EAT (AND DRINK)

Let's talk waffles, gorgeously decorated with blueberries and frothy whipped cream, served next to a steaming cup of coffee. On a gondola ride, "Have you had the waffles?" is the answer to our question, "Where should we eat?" So, make sure at least one of your ski days includes a mid-morning or mid-afternoon break at **Crystal Hut** on Blackcomb's Crystal Ridge (800/766-0449). The après scene at Whistler truly is a scene. **Garibaldi Lift Company Bar & Grill** (4165 Springs Ln., 604/905-2220) is the big show with the see-and-be-seen crowd. For a quieter wind down, try **Bar Oso** (150-4222 Village Square, 604/962-4540, baroso.ca) a tapas joint with an interesting and extensive wine list of Spanish

varietals. Wherever you après, try a Bloody Caesar, a Canadian variant on the Bloody Mary made with Clamato juice. The bartenders around Whistler attempt to outdo each other with both classic and ridiculously adorned Bloody Caesars. For the former, stop into **Dusty's Bar & BBQ** in Creekside Village (2040 London Ln., RR 2, 604/905-2171). For the latter, clomp those ski boots into **Merlin's Bar & Grill** (4553 Blackcomb Way, 604/938-7700) and, with a straight face, ask for "The Jester." Chances are you won't be able to keep that straight face: The Jester comes garnished with chicken wings, onion rings, cured bacon, and beef jerky.

TRAVEL

The premier dining destination in the Whistler area is **Rimrock Café** (2117 Whistler Rd., 604/932-5565, rimrockcafe.com). Here the servers are lifer ski bums who are not only hospitality pros, but also offer great beta on tomorrow's ski plans. For something more casual, try **Creekbread Pizza** (2021 Karen Crescent, 604/905-6666, creekbread.com), a convivial wood-fired

pizza joint near Creekside Village. Craft beer lovers who like hipster menus will love **Hunter Gather** (101-4368 Main St., 604/966-2372, huntergatherwhistler.com). Take in the views over lunch at **Christine's on Blackcomb**, a beautifully designed nouvelle cuisine restaurant in the Rendezvous Lodge perched high on Blackcomb Peak (604/938-7437).



REST UP

Whistler is a sprawling ski area with many options for places to stay, including a wide-ranging selection of vacation rentals, bed and breakfasts, and a solid lineup of full-service hotels. As you consider the options, know that where you stay is a big factor in determining the kind of trip you'll have. **Creekside Village**, which links to the Creekside Gondola, is a quiet(ish) residential community, with a smaller selection of restaurants and bars than **Whistler Village**. Whistler Village has easy access to both the Blackcomb Excalibur and Whistler Village gondolas, and is the heart of the resort's activity and action. There's a well-run bus system between and around both areas.

In Creekside Village, **Nita Lake Lodge** (2131 Lake Placid Rd., 604/966-5700, nitalakelodge.com) is perched on the shore of (frozen) Nita Lake. A scenic boutique hotel, it's a getaway from your getaway, designed in "mountain modern" chic

style (yes, there are hipster stag heads on the wall). Whistler Village's counterpart to Nita Lake is **Fairmont Chateau Whistler** (4599 Chateau Blvd., 604/938-8000, fairmont.com/whistler). Looming over the village like something out of a Disney fairy tale, it's basically a castle, with turndown service. The **Pan Pacific Whistler Mountainside** (4320 Sundial Crescent, 888/905 9995, panpacific.com) has rooms with views of the gondola lines. **Listel Hotel Whistler** (4121 Village Green, 604/932-1133, listelhotel.com) is a business-class property with a groovy modern lobby. It's also home to the **Bearfoot Bistro** (604/932-3433, bearfootbistro.com), which features the work of Canadian cooking star Melissa Craig, who spins modern twists on Canadian comfort foods. **The Blackcomb Lodge** (4220 Gate Way Dr., 604/935-5700, blackcomblodge.com) offers reasonably priced rooms right in the center of Whistler Village. ⚡

TRANSPORT: RIDE THE SEA-TO-SKY HIGHWAY

Whistler Blackcomb is about a two-hour drive north from Vancouver. While renting a car is an option, take a shuttle: You'll want to sightsee along the well-named Sea-to-Sky Highway. **Whistler Connection** (604/938-9711, whistlerconnectiontravel.com) offers airport transfers to stops in both Creekside and Whistler villages, meet-and-greet services, and more. If you're in a hurry, make like James Bond and book a helicopter (800/944-7853, whistler.com). This will have you in Whistler in a mere thirty minutes,

but at an impressive cost: about \$3,400. The views are amazing, though. Once you're checked in and ready to mingle, it's easy to get around here. Lyft and Uber are only just expanding into Canada, so don't use up your international data plan trying to summon either one. Instead go old school and utilize the area's reliable cab services. Bonus: The local drivers are a colorful lot who are invariably listening to a hockey game on the radio and speak the Queen's English with a thick Canadian brogue. Nice one, eh?



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